10 Tips You Should Know To Work With News Media

Presented by CDC Media Relations Division
Tip #10

Interviews are not conversations
Tip #9

Understand how a reporter looks at news

Timely
Change
Controversy
Tip #8

Each media outlet is different

- Deadlines
- Information Gathering
“Science is a long movie, and news media generally take mere snapshots.”

John Schwartz - Washington Post
Tip #7

Define Your Agenda

- Who’s the audience?
- What’s your goal?
- What’s your objective?
- What’s the audience outcome?
Tip #6

Develop Messages

• Explain THE WHAT
  → State facts; break down behaviors into small steps; address problem directly; provide a solution

• Explain SO WHAT, WHY NOW?
  → Address the reasons or benefits. Why is this need compelling?
Develop Messages

• NOW WHAT?
  → Define your desirable outcome.

♦ “We need more information”
♦ “This study does …”
♦ “We want to reach a specific audience”
Tip #5

Your Interview Bill of Rights

- Who am I talking to? Who do you represent?
- What’s the type of show, publication, etc.? What’s the format? live/tape, panel, etc.
- What’s the focus of your story? Who else is being interviewed?
- How does my point of view fit in?
“The first thing to understand about science is that it is almost always uncertain.”

Victor Cohn,

*News And Numbers*
Tip #4

Be prepared – practice
Tip #3

Interview Tips

- Give each interview your full attention. Turn off distractions. Shut off phones.
- Headlining - state your summary first
- Sound bites – TV - condense your message to 8-12 seconds
- Radio – 30-45 seconds
- Be prepared - know your messages
- If you inadvertently misstate an answer, correct it as quickly as possible
The Tools

- Block & Bridge
- Speculation
- Hypothetical
- Feeding the Mike
- The Pause

- Headlining
- Character Attack
- Machine Gun
- Hot Mike
- Negative Baggage
- Props
Answer the question, then bridge to your agenda

- “What I think you are really asking is…”
- “The overall issue is…”
- “What’s important to remember…”
- “It’s our policy to not discuss ...., but what I can tell you is…”
- “What I’m really here to discuss is…”
- “Your readers/viewers need to know…”
Headlining

✦ Use an inverted pyramid -- state your conclusion first
Speculation & Hypothetical

- Risky, tricky questions
- Do your scientific results reach this finding? No? Then block & bridge to your agenda
Character Attack

- Don’t lock horns with an adversary during the interview
- Do question the science, issues, goals, but not someone’s character
- Block & bridge
Reporter fires rapid questions at you and interrupts your answers

“Please let me answer this question, it’s important for your audience to know...”

You control the pace and the interview. Take the time to think
Feeding the Mike & The Pause

- The reporter pauses and waits - you’ve discussed your key messages
- Stay on your agenda
- Be aware of non-verbal cues
- It’s the reporter’s job to fill the air-time
You are always on-air -- even during commercial breaks

If on-camera, stay in place until the floor manager says “All clear” and removes your microphone
Questioning starts with “flag words” (negative phrases) or inaccuracies or an either or dilemma

Use positive phrases. Don’t repeat negative words

Correct the inaccuracies without restating the negative
**Props**

- If you take it, you own it. Don’t take it.
TV Interview Tips

⇒ Visual -- is very important

⇒ Body language & words must be consistent

⇒ Eye Contact is vital!

-- Add a smile

⇒ Watch Your Posture

⇒ Practice your “soundbites”
TV Appearance: What to Wear

- **Men** - dark colored suit, light blue shirt, knee-length socks, conservative tie
- **Women** - knee length or longer skirts or dress, avoid loud, clunky jewelry
- **Both** - avoid photo-sensitive glasses, reds, checks/patterns
Radio Interview Tips

- Turn off distractions before starting the interview
- Telephone interviews can be difficult because of the lack of non-verbal feedback. Ask the reporter if he/she understands the issue
Newspaper Interview Tips

- Expect to discuss the subject more in-depth
- Continue to restate your messages
- Be prepared -- you can have notes
- If you’ve misstated a fact, correct it as quickly as possible
- Don’t expect to be able to review the story before hand
Magazine Interview Tips

- Can be specifically targeted to audience segments
- Can explore more complex issues
- Longer life - audience can clip, reread, contemplate material
- Apply same interview “tools & techniques” used for newspaper
"The TV business is a cruel and shallow money trench, a long plastic hallway where thieves and pimps run free and good men die like dogs."

*Hunter S. Thompson*
Tip #2

Select The Right Spokesperson

- Find the right person for the right news media outlet
Tip #1

Tell The Truth